Essay structure basics + tips
(You got this!)

First steps
First, determine the basics of your assignment: are you answering a specific prompt? Are you coming up with your own topic? Are resources provided, or do you need to find your own? What format does this need to be in (MLA, APA, etc.)? These questions will help you map out the rest of your essay.

Title
A title can be surprisingly hard to come up with. If you’re having a hard time, you can always come back to the title at the end. Keep it simple!

Introduction
Next is your introduction, which is the first paragraph of your essay. It’s usually good to reference the prompt or question you’re answering, or the piece of media you’re analyzing. Then, you should include your thesis, which is essentially your reason for writing your essay. You might not be writing an argumentative essay, but you should still be taking a specific position that you prove throughout your essay.

Body paragraphs
Your body paragraphs are the meat of your essay. Three body paragraphs are a place to begin, but do not limit a paper to a specific number of paragraphs unless the instructor has expressly requested such. Start each body paragraph with a brief introduction into what you’ll be saying in that paragraph. Then, present your evidence and, most importantly, your analysis of that evidence. You should be emphasizing how that evidence proves the stance you’ve taken in your thesis. Remember, you’re doing all this to help prove your thesis. To drive it home, wrap up body paragraphs with a connection to your thesis. Then, add a transition to your next body paragraph or your conclusion.

It might be helpful in your “First Steps” to figure out a structure for all your body paragraphs. This helps the reader follow the flow of your logic, and also helps you keep track of your points to make sure you say everything you need to say to fully answer the prompt. You could organize them in many ways, including but not limited to chronological order; cause and effect; problem and solution; etc. Choose a structure that’s right for your prompt.
Your conclusion requires a little creativity. You need to restate the main points of your essay and your thesis without sounding repetitive or introducing new information. It might help to follow the structure you choose for your body paragraphs. For example, if you chose to use a “problem-solution” structure, you might start with a sentence or two to restate the problem, then another couple sentences for the solution.

Let’s review!

First steps
Review prompt, citation style, and structure of body paragraphs

Title
Keep it simple!

Introduction
Reference the prompt/topic, include thesis with specific position

Body paragraphs
Determine number of paragraphs needed, introduce what you’re talking about, present evidence, analyze evidence in relation to your thesis, transition

Conclusion
Creatively restate your thesis and main points, don’t introduce any new information

You made it! Congrats on writing a great essay. The Kilohana Writing Center is always available to help with any questions or concerns you might have. Please check the Kilohana website for tutor availability and email justasc@hawaii.edu to schedule an appointment.

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